

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Alarming Increase in COVID-19 Cases Results in Local Health Authority Ordering Use of Face Masks in Schools

To date, COVID-19 cases have increased 332% from early July 2021

Houston – With schools back in session, the Harris County Local Health Authority is implementing the use of facemasks on all public and non-religious private schools to protect the health of students and their families.

This order is to be followed by students in any and all grades from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, and in all Licensed Child Care Centers offering care and education in Houston and Harris County, for the 2021-2022 school year.

Last week, Judge Lina Hidalgo changed the County's [COVID-19 threat level](#) back to red due to rapidly rising COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations in our community. The increase in cases is mainly attributed to the highly contagious and dangerous [Delta Variant](#) largely infecting unvaccinated individuals. The Local Health Authority stresses our need to work together to protect our children from this devastating virus.

The most powerful tool that we have against COVID-19 is the vaccine. Please note that face coverings are a secondary strategy to getting vaccinated and should be undertaken with other mitigation efforts. All people should follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for how to wear and take off a mask. All teachers, staff, students, and visitors to School Systems should keep up the following habits while in a School System:

- Washing hands before you leave home and when you return;
- Staying at least six feet away from others;
- Avoiding touching nose or face;
- Not using disposable masks more than three times; and
- Washing reusable cloth masks regularly to prevent the spread of the virus.

According to the latest information available, the pandemic is surging again in our community. For the period of July 25 - August 8, 2021, Harris County has seen:

- A 332% increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases
- Current positivity rate is 19%
- 5,122 deaths reported due to COVID-19 in Harris County
- A 180% increase in hospitalizations
- A 152% increase in ICU beds

HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.

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The Delta variant is the greatest threat to unvaccinated people, including children under the age of 12 who cannot be vaccinated. It is critically important that anyone who can receive a vaccine get one immediately. The vast majority of people being hospitalized with COVID-19, including those with the Delta variant, are unvaccinated.

In addition, residents are urged to get tested if they think they are infected or have been exposed to COVID-19. Children can also be tested. HCPH strongly supports the CDC recommendation that everyone, regardless of vaccination status, wear a mask indoors in public places to reduce the spread of COVID-19. The use of masks is an effective tool to reduce the spread of the virus and protects the individual and those around them. Continue to social distance and wash hands thoroughly and often.

Everyone 12 years and older is strongly encouraged to get a COVID-19 vaccine by contacting their healthcare provider, pharmacy or making an appointment through HCPH online at vacstrac.hctx.net. Those seeking vaccination may also call the HCPH Vaccine hotline at 832-927-8787 for assistance. For testing locations, please visit hcphtx.org or call 932-927-7575. For additional COVID-19 information visit www.readyharris.org or www.hcphtx.org.

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